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OXFORD PAMPHLETS
1914

THE RETREAT FROM
MONS

BY
H. W. C. DAVIS

WITH TWO MAPS

THIRD IMPRESSION

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I

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INTRODUCTION

To reconstruct the picture of a modern battle the student must use several different kinds of information. (1) First in importance are the dispatches of the commanders at the front. These give the broad outlines of the struggle, but as a rule do not dwell on episodes; they explain the strategical and tactical considerations which dictated certain moves, but say little about the actual fighting which ensues. (2) Second in importance, but often of far greater interest, are the narratives of men who were in the fighting line. These narratives seldom show much perception of the strategy of the battle, though they often elucidate the minor tactics of the combatants at particular points on the field. (3) Thirdly, we have often vivid accounts from non-combatants of scenes witnessed on the outskirts of a great battle, or in the course of sudden advances and retreats which bring the armies into a zone not evacuated by the civilian population. (4) Lastly, we have often to use official communications, drawn up at a distance from the field, but based on the interim reports of commanders. These often give details which are omitted in the final and formal dispatches.

In the following pages we give samples of these four sorts of narrative, to illustrate the operations of the British Expeditionary Force, under the com-

mand of Field Marshal Sir John French, during the retreat from Mons to the line Noyon-Chauny-La Fère (August 23-8, 1914). First of all we print (pp. 7-20) the dispatch of Sir John French which is dated September 7; this supplies the outline narrative to which all our other documents are supplementary. With it must be studied a statement published a week earlier by the War Office (pp. 20-3), which is founded upon the interim reports of Sir John French, and which is useful because it gives some details omitted from his formal dispatch. Next we give a group of soldiers' letters (pp. 24-36), chiefly relating to the early stages of the retreat. Many such letters might have been given, but these will serve as examples of our most picturesque source of information. Lastly, we give a diary (pp. 36-9) of an onlooker at Tournai, who witnessed the beginning of the German flank movement towards the British left, and the efforts of the gallant French Territorials to delay that movement. These French troops were sent forward by General d'Amade from the direction of Arras to relieve the pressure on the British Force. He was the only French commander supporting our left flank, and his work is appreciatively mentioned by Sir John French. It is a curious fact that he became aware of the German flanking movement about twenty-four hours before it was known at Mons. About the same interval of time elapsed between the French evacuation of Charleroi on the English right and the communication of this important fact to the English Commander-in-Chief. Hence our troops were exposed on Sunday, August 23, to

the danger of an attack on both flanks simultaneously. Fortunately no attack appears to have been delivered from the direction of Charleroi; and that from Tournai was delayed for some hours by the great gallantry of a French Territorial battalion, under General de Villaret, as described in our document. This battalion was eventually captured; but the good work which it had begun was continued by other bodies of the troops which General d'Amade had under his command.

The theatre of the English operations is described in some notes added to the maps which we print below (facing p. 21). The exact composition of the English force cannot be given at present; but some facts are disclosed by Sir John French. The infantry was grouped in two Army Corps; the First Corps operating on the east (the English right) under the command of Lieutenant-General Sir Douglas Haig; the Second Corps on the west (the English left) under General Sir Horace Smith-Dorrien. There was one Cavalry Division under Major General Allenby; and the 5th Cavalry Brigade operated independently under Brigadier-General Sir Philip Chetwode.

The numbers of the force so constituted are not given. But we are told of five Infantry Divisions in all. The First Division formed the right, the Second Division the left of the First Corps; the Third Division (under Major General Hubert Hamilton) formed the right of the Second Corps, and the Fifth (under General Sir Charles Fergusson) its left. The Fourth Division (under General Snow) was pushed up by train to Le Cateau on August 23

and reinforced the Second Corps on the morning of the 25th. Earlier than this, on the morning of August 24, the Second Corps had been reinforced by the 19th Infantry Brigade coming up from the line of communications. An Infantry Brigade is one-third of a Division. We may take the normal strength of the Infantry Division at 18,000 men, of a Cavalry Division at 9,250 men. It results that, on Sunday, August 23, the English force numbered at least 72,000 men of the Infantry Division, and 9,250 men of the Cavalry Division (possibly over 10,000 cavalry, if Sir Philip Chetwode's Brigade was not part of the strength of General Allenby's Division). On August 24, the arrival of the 19th Infantry Brigade may have brought up as many as 6,000 men; and on August 25 the arrival of General Snow's Division may have added 18,000 men. Against this Army, which can never at any given moment have much exceeded 100,000 men, the German General Staff launched five Army Corps, containing at least 250,000 combatants. In artillery, as we are told by Sir John French himself, the English were outnumbered by at least four to one. Under these circumstances, the retreat, in spite of the heavy losses suffered, stands out as the finest British feat of arms since Waterloo. It was a retreat in which the assailants suffered infinitely more than the assailed, and were completely unsuccessful as to their main object; which was to outflank the Expeditionary Force and to pin it against the fortress of Maubeuge.

THE RETREAT FROM MONS

I

War Office, September 9, 1914.

THE following despatch has been received by the Secretary of State for War from the Field-Marshal Commanding-in-Chief, British Forces in the Field:—

7th September, 1914.

MY LORD,

I have the honour to report the proceedings of the Field Force under my command up to the time of rendering this despatch.

POSITION AT MONS, AUGUST 22-3.

1. The transport of the troops from England both by sea and by rail was effected in the best order and without a check. Each unit arrived at its destination in this country well within the scheduled time.

The concentration was practically complete on the evening of Friday, the 21st ultimo, and I was able to make dispositions to move the Force during Saturday, the 22nd, to positions I considered most favourable from which to commence operations which the French Commander-in-Chief, General Joffre requested me to undertake in pursuance of his plans in prosecution of the campaign.

The line taken up extended along the line of the

canal from Conde on the west, through Mons and Binche on the east. This line was taken up as follows:—

From Conde to Mons inclusive was assigned to the Second Corps, and to the right of the Second Corps from Mons the First Corps was posted. The 5th Cavalry Brigade was placed at Binche.

In the absence of my Third Army Corps I desired to keep the Cavalry Division as much as possible as a reserve to act on my outer flank, or move in support of any threatened part of the line. The forward reconnaissance was entrusted to Brigadier-General Sir Philip Chetwode with the 5th Cavalry Brigade, but I directed General Allenby to send forward a few squadrons to assist in this work.

During the 22nd and 23rd these advanced squadrons did some excellent work, some of them penetrating as far as Soignies, and several encounters took place in which our troops showed to great advantage.

DEVELOPMENT OF GERMAN ATTACK, AUGUST 23.

2. At 6 a.m., on August 23rd, I assembled the Commanders of the First and Second Corps and Cavalry Division at a point close to the position, and explained the general situation of the Allies, and what I understood to be General Joffre's plan. I discussed with them at some length the immediate situation in front of us.

From information I received from French Headquarters I understood that little more than one, or at most two, of the enemy's Army Corps, with per-

haps one Cavalry Division, were in front of my position; and I was aware of no attempted out-flanking movement by the enemy. I was confirmed in this opinion by the fact that my patrols encountered no undue opposition in their reconnoitring operations. The observation of my aeroplanes seemed also to bear out this estimate.

About 3 p.m. on Sunday, the 23rd, reports began coming in to the effect that the enemy was commencing an attack on the Mons line, apparently in some strength, but that the right of the position from Mons and Bray was being particularly threatened.

The Commander of the First Corps had pushed his flank back to some high ground south of Bray, and the 5th Cavalry Brigade evacuated Binche, moving slightly south: the enemy thereupon occupied Binche.

The right of the 3rd Division, under General Hamilton, was at Mons, which formed a somewhat dangerous salient; and I directed the Commander of the Second Corps to be careful not to keep the troops on this salient too long, but, if threatened seriously, to draw back the centre behind Mons. This was done before dark. In the meantime, about 5 p.m., I received a most unexpected message from General Joffre by telegraph, telling me that at least three German Corps viz. a reserve corps, the 4th Corps and the 9th Corps, were moving on my position in front, and that the Second Corps was engaged in a turning movement from the direction of Tournay. He also informed me that the two reserve

French divisions and the 5th French Army on my right were retiring, the Germans having on the previous day gained possession of the passages of the Sambre between Charleroi and Namur.

BRITISH RETIREMENT TO BAVAI-MAUBEUGE LINE,
AUGUST 24.

3. In view of the possibility of my being driven from the Mons position, I had previously ordered a position in rear to be reconnoitred. This position rested on the fortress of Maubeuge on the right and extended west to Jenlain, south-east of Valenciennes, on the left. The position was reported difficult to hold, because standing crops and buildings made the siting of trenches very difficult and limited the field of fire in many important localities. It nevertheless afforded a few good artillery positions.

When the news of the retirement of the French and the heavy German threatening on my front reached me, I endeavoured to confirm it by aeroplane reconnaissance; and as a result of this I determined to effect a retirement to the Maubeuge position at daybreak on the 24th.

A certain amount of fighting continued along the whole line throughout the night, and at daybreak on the 24th the 2nd Division from the neighbourhood of Harmignies made a powerful demonstration as if to retake Binche. This was supported by the artillery of both the 1st and 2nd Divisions, whilst the 1st Division took up a supporting position in the neighbourhood of Peissant. Under cover of this demonstration the Second Corps retired on the

line Dour-Quarouble-Frameries. The 3rd Division on the right of the Corps suffered considerable loss in this operation from the enemy, who had retaken Mons.

The Second Corps halted on this line, where they partially entrenched themselves, enabling Sir Douglas Haig with the First Corps gradually to withdraw to the new position; and he effected this without much further loss, reaching the line Bavai-Maubeuge about 7 p.m. Towards midday the enemy appeared to be directing his principal effort against our left.

I had previously ordered General Allenby with the Cavalry to act vigorously in advance of my left front and endeavour to take the pressure off.

LOSSES OF 2ND CAVALRY BRIGADE.

About 7.30 a.m. General Allenby received a message from Sir Charles Fergusson, commanding 5th Division, saying that he was very hard pressed and in urgent need of support. On receipt of this message General Allenby drew in the Cavalry and endeavoured to bring direct support to the 5th Division.

During the course of this operation General de Lisle, of the 2nd Cavalry Brigade, thought he saw a good opportunity to paralyse the further advance of the enemy's infantry by making a mounted attack on his flank. He formed up and advanced for this purpose, but was held up by wire about 500 yards from his objective, and the 9th Lancers and 18th Hussars suffered severely in the retirement of the Brigade.

SUPPORTS BROUGHT UP FROM VALENCIENNES.

The 19th Infantry Brigade, which had been guarding the Line of Communications, was brought up by rail to Valenciennes on the 22nd and 23rd. On the morning of the 24th they were moved out to a position south of Quarouble to support the left flank of the Second Corps.

With the assistance of the Cavalry Sir Horace Smith-Dorrien was enabled to effect his retreat to a new position; although, having two corps of the enemy on his front and one threatening his flank, he suffered great losses in doing so.

At nightfall the position was occupied by the Second Corps to the west of Bavai, the First Corps to the right. The right was protected by the Fortress of Maubeuge, the left by the 19th Brigade in position between Jenlain and Bry, and the Cavalry on the outer flank.

FURTHER RETIREMENT TO CAMBRAI-LE CATEAU-
LANDRECIES LINE, AUGUST 25.

4. The French were still retiring, and I had no support except such as was afforded by the Fortress of Maubeuge; and the determined attempts of the enemy to get round my left flank assured me that it was his intention to hem me against that place and surround me. I felt that not a moment must be lost in retiring to another position.

I had every reason to believe that the enemy's forces were somewhat exhausted, and I knew that they had suffered heavy losses. I hoped, therefore,

that his pursuit would not be too vigorous to prevent me effecting my object.

The operation, however, was full of danger and difficulty, not only owing to the very superior force in my front, but also to the exhaustion of the troops.

The retirement was recommenced in the early morning of the 25th to a position in the neighbourhood of Le Cateau, and rearguards were ordered to be clear of the Maubeuge-Bavai-Eth Road by 5.30 a.m.

Two Cavalry Brigades, with the Divisional Cavalry of the Second Corps, covered the movement of the Second Corps. The remainder of the Cavalry Division with the 19th Brigade, the whole under the command of General Allenby, covered the west flank.

The 4th Division commenced its detrainment at Le Cateau on Sunday, the 23rd, and by the morning of the 25th eleven battalions and a Brigade of Artillery with Divisional Staff were available for service.

I ordered General Snow to move out to take up a position with his right south of Solesmes, his left resting on the Cambrai-Le Cateau Road south of La Chaprie. In this position the Division rendered great help to the effective retirement of the Second and First Corps to the new position.

Although the troops had been ordered to occupy the Cambrai-Le Cateau-Landrecies position, and the ground had, during the 25th, been partially prepared and entrenched, I had grave doubts—owing

to the information I received as to the accumulating strength of the enemy against me—as to the wisdom of standing there to fight.

Having regard to the continued retirement of the French on my right, my exposed left flank, the tendency of the enemy's western corps (II.) to envelop me, and, more than all, the exhausted condition of the troops, I determined to make a great effort to continue the retreat till I could put some substantial obstacle, such as the Somme or the Oise, between my troops and the enemy, and afford the former some opportunity of rest and reorganization. Orders were, therefore, sent to the Corps Commanders to continue their retreat as soon as they possibly could towards the general line Vermand-St. Quentin-Ribemont.

The Cavalry, under General Allenby, were ordered to cover the retirement.

Throughout the 25th and far into the evening, the First Corps continued its march on Landrecies, following the road along the eastern border of the Forêt De Mormal, and arrived at Landrecies about 10 o'clock. I had intended that the Corps should come further west so as to fill up the gap between La Cateau and Landrecies, but the men were exhausted and could not get further in without rest.

The enemy, however, would not allow them this rest, and about 9.30 p.m. a report was received that the 4th Guards Brigade in Landrecies was heavily attacked by troops of the 9th German Army Corps who were coming through the forest on the north of the town. This brigade fought most gal-

lantly and caused the enemy to suffer tremendous loss in issuing from the forest into the narrow streets of the town. This loss has been estimated from reliable sources at from 700 to 1,000. At the same time information reached me from Sir Douglas Haig that his 1st Division was also heavily engaged south and east of Maroilles. I sent urgent messages to the Commander of the two French Reserve Divisions on my right to come up to the assistance of the First Corps, which they eventually did. Partly owing to this assistance, but mainly to the skilful manner in which Sir Douglas Haig extricated his Corps from an exceptionally difficult position in the darkness of the night, they were able at dawn to resume their march south towards Wassigny on Guise.

By about 6 p.m. the Second Corps had got into position with their right on Le Cateau, their left in the neighbourhood of Caudry, and the line of defence was continued thence by the 4th Division towards Seranvillers, the left being thrown back.

During the fighting on the 24th and 25th the Cavalry became a good deal scattered, but by the early morning of the 26th General Allenby had succeeded in concentrating two brigades to the south of Cambrai.

The 4th Division was placed under the orders of the General Officer Commanding the Second Army Corps.

On the 24th the French Cavalry Corps, consisting of three divisions, under General Sordêt, had been in billets north of Avesnes. On my way back from

Bavai, which was my "Poste de Commandement" during the fighting of the 23rd and 24th, I visited General Sordêt, and earnestly requested his co-operation and support. He promised to obtain sanction from his Army Commander to act on my left flank, but said that his horses were too tired to move before the next day. Although he rendered me valuable assistance later on in the course of the retirement, he was unable for the reasons given to afford me any support on the most critical day of all, viz. the 26th.

At daybreak it became apparent that the enemy was throwing the bulk of his strength against the left of the position occupied by the Second Corps and the 4th Division.

At this time the guns of four German Army Corps were in position against them, and Sir Horace Smith-Dorrien reported to me that he judged it impossible to continue his retirement at daybreak (as ordered) in face of such an attack.

I sent him orders to use his utmost endeavours to break off the action and retire at the earliest possible moment, as it was impossible for me to send him any support, the First Corps being at the moment incapable of movement.

The French Cavalry Corps, under General Sordêt, was coming up on our left rear early in the morning, and I sent an urgent message to him to do his utmost to come up and support the retirement of my left flank; but owing to the fatigue of his horses he found himself unable to intervene in any way.

There had been no time to entrench the position

properly, but the troops showed a magnificent front to the terrible fire which confronted them.

The Artillery, although outmatched by at least four to one, made a splendid fight, and inflicted heavy losses on their opponents.

At length it became apparent that, if complete annihilation was to be avoided, a retirement must be attempted ; and the order was given to commence it about 3.30 p.m. The movement was covered with the most devoted intrepidity and determination by the Artillery, which had itself suffered heavily, and the fine work done by the Cavalry in the further retreat from the position assisted materially in the final completion of this most difficult and dangerous operation.

Fortunately the enemy had himself suffered too heavily to engage in an energetic pursuit.

I cannot close the brief account of this glorious stand of the British troops without putting on record my deep appreciation of the valuable services rendered by General Sir Horace Smith-Dorrien.

I say without hesitation that the saving of the left wing of the Army under my command on the morning of the 26th August could never have been accomplished unless a commander of rare and unusual coolness, intrepidity, and determination had been present to personally conduct the operation.

The retreat was continued far into the night of the 26th and through the 27th and 28th, on which date the troops halted on the line Noyon-Chauny-La Fere, having then thrown off the weight of the enemy's pursuit.

On the 27th and 28th I was much indebted to General Sordet and the French Cavalry Division which he commands for materially assisting my retirement and successfully driving back some of the enemy on Cambrai.

General D'Amade also, with the 61st and 62nd French Reserve Divisions, moved down from the neighbourhood of Arras on the enemy's right flank and took much pressure off the rear of the British Forces.

This closes the period covering the heavy fighting which commenced at Mons on Sunday afternoon, 23rd August, and which really constituted a four days' battle.

At this point, therefore, I propose to close the present despatch.

I deeply deplore the very serious losses which the British Forces have suffered in this great battle; but they were inevitable in view of the fact that the British Army—only two days after a concentration by rail—was called upon to withstand a vigorous attack of five German Army Corps.

It is impossible for me to speak too highly of the skill evinced by the two General Officers commanding Army Corps; the self-sacrificing and devoted exertions of their Staffs; the direction of the troops by Divisional, Brigade and Regimental Leaders; the command of the smaller units by their officers; and the magnificent fighting spirit displayed by non-commissioned officers and men.

I wish particularly to bring to your Lordship's notice the admirable work done by the Royal Flying

Corps under Sir David Henderson. Their skill, energy and perseverance have been beyond all praise. They have furnished me with the most complete and accurate information, which has been of incalculable value in the conduct of the operations. Fired at constantly both by friend and foe, and not hesitating to fly in every kind of weather, they have remained undaunted throughout.

Further, by actually fighting in the air, they have succeeded in destroying five of the enemy's machines.

I wish to acknowledge with deep gratitude incalculable assistance I received from the General and Personal Staffs at Headquarters during this trying period.

Lieutenant-General Sir Archibald Murray, Chief of the General Staff; Major-General Wilson, Sub-Chief of the General Staff; and all under them have worked day and night unceasingly with the utmost skill, self-sacrifice, and devotion; and the same acknowledgment is due by me to Brigadier-General Hon. W. Lambton, my Military Secretary, and the Personal Staff.

In such operations as I have described the work of the Quartermaster-General is of an extremely onerous nature. Major-General Sir William Robertson has met what appeared to be almost insuperable difficulties with his characteristic energy, skill and determination; and it is largely owing to his exertions that the hardships and sufferings of the troops—inseparable from such operations—were not much greater.

Major-General Sir Nevil Macready, the Adjutant-

General, has also been confronted with most onerous and difficult tasks in connection with disciplinary arrangements and the preparation of casualty lists. He has been indefatigable in his exertions to meet the difficult situations which arose.

I have not yet been able to complete the list of officers whose names I desire to bring to your Lordship's notice for services rendered during the period under review ; and, as I understand it is of importance that this despatch should no longer be delayed, I propose to forward this list, separately, as soon as I can.

I have the honour to be,
Your Lordship's most obedient Servant,
(Signed) J. D. P. FRENCH, "Old-Marshal,
Commander-in-Chief,
British Forces in the Field.

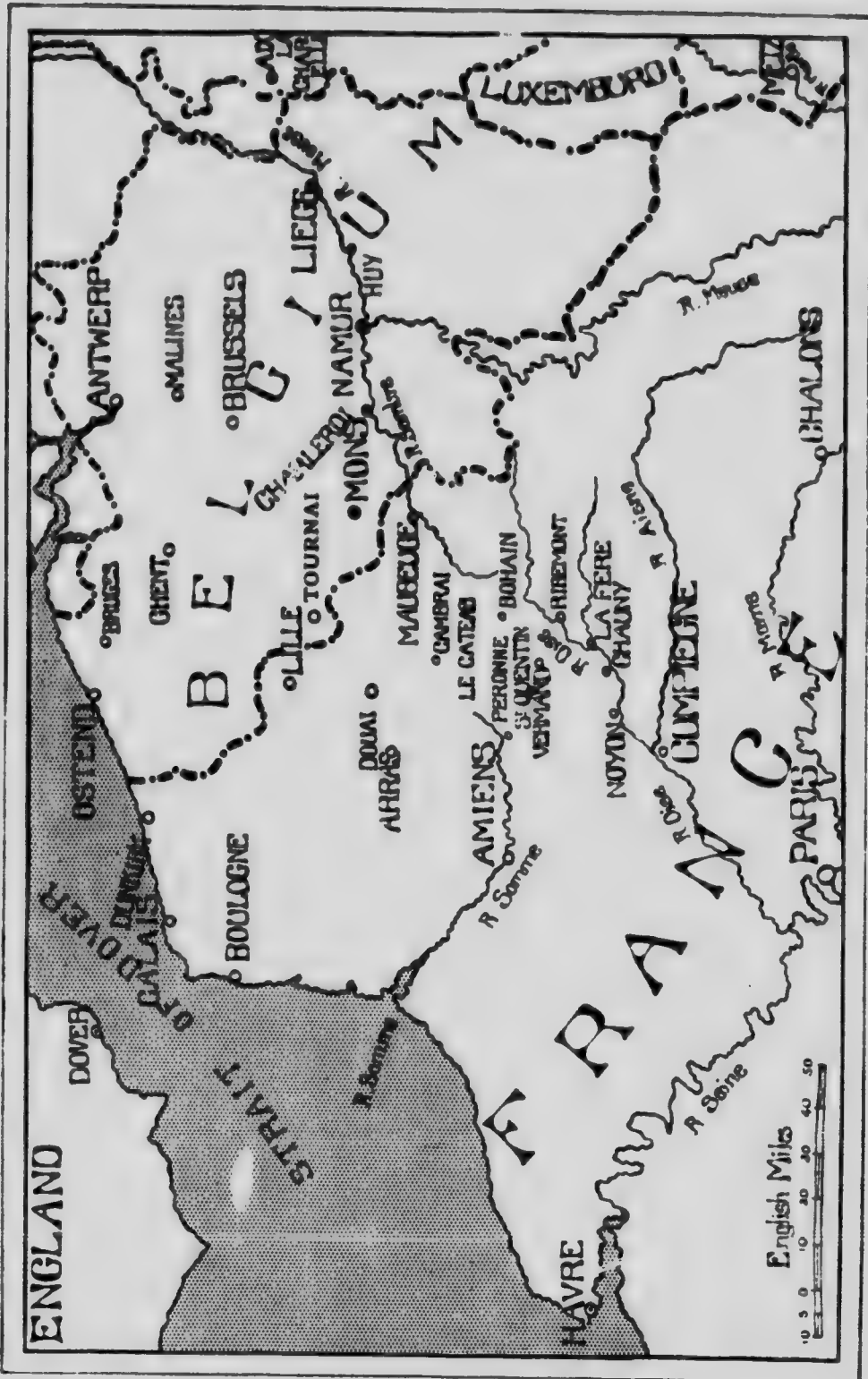
II

The following statement, issued by the Secretary of State for War, was published in the newspapers of August 31, 1914 :—

Although the official dispatches from Sir John French on the recent battles have not yet been received it is possible now to state in general outline what the British share in the recent operations has been.

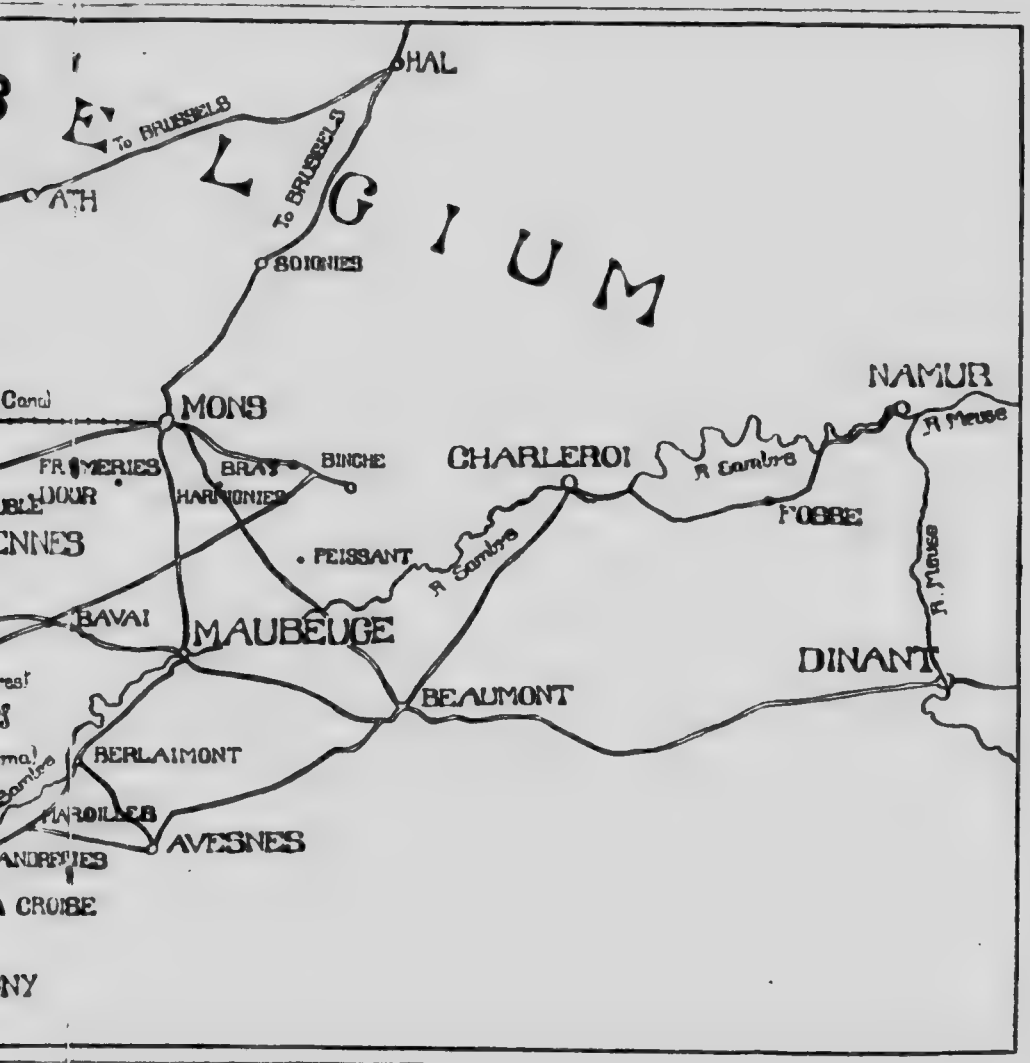
There has, in effect, been a four days' battle—on the 23rd, 24th, 25th, and 26th of August. During the whole of this period the British troops, in conformity with the general movement of the French

MAP I





MAP II



INDEX OF PRINCIPAL PLACES ON MAP II

- Arras.** A French industrial town, strongly fortified, with a population of 20,000.
- Avesnes.** A French manufacturing town of less than 5,000 inhabitants.
- Bavai.** A French village with iron works and marble quarries.
- Binche.** A small Belgian town of 10,000 inhabitants between Mons and Charleroi.
- Cambrai.** A French cathedral and industrial town, strongly fortified, with a population of 24,000.
- Charleroi.** A strongly fortified Belgian town on the river Sambre, a centre of coal-mining, iron-founding and various manufactures; the population is 20,000.
- Condé.** A small fortified town, important as a centre of the coal trade.
- Donai.** A strongly fortified French industrial town with a population of 30,000.
- Dour and Frameries.** Small Belgian towns of 10,000 inhabitants each, centres of coal-mining in the Mons district.
- Landrecies.** A French market town of less than 3,000 inhabitants.
- Le Cateau.** A French town, of historical associations, but slight actual importance; population 10,000.
- Maroilles.** A French village of less than 2,000 inhabitants, famous for its cheese.
- Maubeuge.** A French town (strongly fortified) with a population of 12,000; a centre of iron-founding and hardware manufactures.
- Mons.** A Belgian town in the province of Hainault with a population of about 25,000; a centre of coal-mining, iron, and glass works; connected with Condé and the river Scheldt by a canal, to the south of which the English Second Corps was stationed on August 28.
- Orchies.** A small French market town, with a population under 4,000.
- St. Amand.** A French manufacturing town, with a population of 12,000.
- Solesmes.** A French town with a population of 6,000 inhabitants, a centre of textile industries.
- Tournai.** A Belgian cathedral town, with spinning industries, and a population of 35,000.
- Valenciennes.** A French fortified and manufacturing town, with a population of about 28,000.

armies, were occupied in resisting and checking the German advance and in withdrawing to the new lines of defence.

The battle began at Mons, on Sunday, during which day and part of the night the German attack, which was stubbornly pressed and repeated, was completely checked on the British front.

On Monday, the 24th, the Germans made vigorous efforts in superior numbers to prevent the safe withdrawal of the British Army and to drive it into the fortress of Maubeuge. This effort was frustrated by the steadiness and skill with which the British retirement was conducted, and, as on the previous day, very heavy losses, far in excess of anything suffered by us, were inflicted upon the enemy, who in dense formation and in enormous masses, marched forward again and yet again to storm the British lines.

The British retirement proceeded on the 25th with continuous fighting though not on the scale of the previous two days, and by the night of the 25th the British Army occupied the line Cambrai-Landrecies-Le Cateau.

It had been intended to resume the retirement at daybreak on the 26th, but the German attack, in which no less than five Corps were engaged, was so close and fierce that it was not possible to carry out this intention until the afternoon.

The battle on this day, August 26th, was of the most severe and desperate character. The troops offered a superb and most stubborn resistance to the tremendous odds with which they were confronted,

and at length extricated themselves in good order, though with serious losses and under the heaviest artillery fire.

No guns were taken by the enemy except those the horses of which were all killed, or which were shattered by high explosive shells.

Sir John French estimates that during the whole of these operations, from the 23rd to the 26th inclusive, his losses amount to 5,000 or 6,000 men. On the other hand the losses suffered by the Germans in their attacks across the open, and through their dense formations, are out of all proportion to those which we have suffered.

In La. Precies alone, on the 26th as an instance, a German Infantry brigade advanced in the closest order into the narrow street, which they completely filled. Our machine guns were brought to bear on this target from the end of the town. The head of the column was swept away, a frightful panic ensued, and it is estimated that no less than 800 to 900 dead and wounded Germans were lying in this street alone.

Another incident which may be chosen from many like it was the charge of the German Guard Cavalry Division upon the British 12th Infantry Brigade, when the German Cavalry were thrown back with great loss and in absolute disorder. These are notable examples of what has taken place over practically the whole front during these engagements, and the Germans have been made to pay the extreme price for every forward march they have made.

Since the 26th, apart from Cavalry fighting, the

British Army has not been molested. It has rested and refitted after its exertions and glorious achievements.

Reinforcements amounting to double the loss suffered have already joined. Every gun has been replaced and the Army is now ready to take part in the next great encounter with undiminished strength and undaunted spirit.

To-day the news is again favourable. The British have not been engaged, but the French armies, acting vigorously on their right and left, have for the time being brought the German attack to a standstill.

Sir John French also reports that on the 28th the 5th British Cavalry Brigade, under General Chetwode, fought a brilliant action with the German Cavalry, in the course of which the 12th Lancers and Royal Scots Greys routed the enemy, and speared large numbers in flight.

It must be remembered throughout that the operations in France, vast though they are, are only one wing of the whole field of battle. The strategic position of ourselves and our Allies is such that whereas a decisive victory to our arms in France would probably be fatal to the enemy, the continuance of resistance by the Anglo-French armies upon such a scale as to keep in the closest grip the enemy's best troops can, if prolonged, lead only to one conclusion.

APPENDIX A

By the courtesy of the *Evening News* and *The Times* we are able to give extracts from two narratives of soldiers who were in the front line at Mons. The first writer (a private in the 1st Royal West Kent Regiment) was in action to the north of the Mons-Condé canal. The second, a sapper, was on the canal and south of it. Both writers describe the retreat; but the details which they give are of little importance.

I

It was Sunday, the 23rd August, that we were at Mons, billeted in a farmyard, and we were having a sing-song and watching people home from church.

At about 12.30 an orderly had gone down to draw dinners when an aeroplane appeared overhead, throwing out some black powder. After this, shrapnel burst overhead, acquainting us of the fact that the Germans were in the vicinity.

All was confusion and uproar for the moment, because we were not armed and our shirts and socks were out to wash, that being the only chance we had to get them washed.

It did not take us long, however, to get in fighting trim and to go through the town of Mons to the scene of operations, which was on the other side of a small canal that adjoined.

Here we found the A Company of the Royal West Kents engaged in a hard tussle in keeping off the enemy until support arrived. The A Company had been engaged in outpost duty, so that they were the first to meet the enemy. The A Company lost very heavily here, losing all the officers except one.

BLOWING UP THE BRIDGE.

This was Lieutenant Bell, who showed great valour in going out to bring in the wounded. Most of the damage was done by the shells, although at times the enemy were within three hundred yards of our troops.

We arrived in the nick of time and took up position in a glass-blowing factory. We loopholed the walls and held that position until darkness set in. With darkness upon us we fixed our bayonets and lay in wait in case the enemy made an attempt to rush us.

About 11 p.m. we received orders to retire over the canal. Two sections of C Company were left to keep the enemy in check whilst the remainder of the battalion retired. After all had crossed, the bridge was blown up, so that we were likely to be left in peace until the Germans could find a means of crossing the river.

The two sections of C Company that had been left behind, unfortunately, could not retire over the bridge before it was blown up, and they had to find their own ways and means of getting across. Most of them managed to do so.

We retired from the town of Mons and got into open country, but we still kept on moving throughout the night. When daylight arrived we saw that Mons had been practically blown away, and that the Germans were also firing at times at the hospital.

Throughout the morning we continued to fight a rear-guard action. We did not leave off trekking until six in the evening.

VANQUISHED GERMAN AIRMAN.

About eight o'clock all lights were ordered to be put out and no noise to be made, and we all lay down for a well-earned rest, putting out pickets in case of surprise. About an hour

before dawn we were all ordered to stand to arms, and the column was once more engaged in a retiring movement.

There was one interesting sight I saw as the column was on the march, and that was a duel in the air between French and German aeroplanes. It was wonderful to see the Frenchman manœuvre to get the upper position of the German, and after about ten minutes or a quarter of an hour the Frenchman got on top and blazed away with a revolver on the German.

He injured him so much as to cause him to descend, and when found he was dead. The British troops buried the airman and burnt the aeroplane.

During that day we were not troubled by any more German aeroplanes, and about 5 p.m. a halt was ordered, and we took things comfortably, hoping to have a rest until daylight came again. We were fortunate enough not to be disturbed that night, and at dawn we again stood to arms, and we found the Germans close upon our heels.

The column got on the move, and several regiments were ordered to entrench themselves. We found it very hot and fatiguing work with such small tools to use. We soon found, however, that where there's a will there's a way, and quickly entrenched ourselves so as to be protected from the artillery fire.

It was not long before the German artillery found our trenches and gave us rather a warm time. Our own artillery had to open fire at 2,100 yards, which was very close for artillery. I saw a battery in front of us put right out of action.

ALL THAT WAS LEFT OF THEM.

There were only about six men left amongst them, and they were engaged in trying to get away the guns. This disaster was due to the accurate shell-firing of the German artillery.

In their efforts the brave gunners were not successful, owing to their horses being killed. It was interesting to see an officer engaged in walking round the guns and putting them out of action, or, in other words, seeing that they would be of no use to the Germans. This action required a great deal of bravery under the circumstances, because the enemy continued to keep up the heavy firing.

Much bravery was also displayed by wounded comrades of the battery helping one another to get out of the firing line.

About this time the enemy were advancing, owing to the superiority of numbers, and hand-to-hand fighting had taken place in the right trenches, the Argylls and several other regiments being engaged, but the nearest the enemy came to us at this point was about 500 yards.

Owing to the artillery fire being so heavy, and the British being in such comparatively small numbers, the officer in charge of my company deemed it wise to retire. It was rather too late, however, and he said to the men that were in the trenches: 'Now, boys, every man for himself.'

FIRING ON A HOSPITAL.

Having got these orders, we were not long in doing a retiring movement and trying to save our own skins. It was hard to see my own comrades being cut down like corn owing to the deadly shrapnel firing.

I myself was wounded at this point by a bullet from a Maxim gun. I staggered at the time, thinking my hand had been blown off, but I recovered and kept on the run, and got in a trench, where I bandaged myself up. From there I continued to retire on my own, as I had lost touch with my section.

I ran into the General Commanding, and he asked me what was the matter with me. I told him I was wounded,

and he said, 'For God's sake, man, don't go into the hospital: they are blowing it up now!' I did not want telling that twice, and I started to track down country to get into touch with the column, where I knew the ambulance men were, and they would dress my wound.

II

WE were in action all day—fifteen hours of it. We blew up barges lying up the canal. About 12 o'clock we had to get the charges together, and several were laid. While we were laying them we were under fire all the time. But the Germans could do anything but hit us. The shells were flying all round. One of our fellows, a lance-corporal of the Dorsets, if he killed one German he killed 2,000. He was using a Maxim, and was at it all day. He was supposed to be the crack shot of the Army. There were so many Germans all around that we didn't know whether we were shooting dead men or not. The lance-corporal was as cool as anything. Our infantry were firing from about 350 yards range all day. We were quite close enough up. After we had laid the charges, we got back under cover.

At night we had barbed wire to put across the road. We got up pretty close to the German lines, for we could hear them talking. Later on we had six bridges to blow up. The centre bridge was to go up first, and we were to get over quickly after we had laid the charge. While we were waiting—there were ten of us—we saw a chap from the West Kents coming over, and we told him to jump for his life. The fuse was actually burning at the time, and I guess he broke all the records for jumping. When we ran over the bridge there were some German snipers in some trees trying to hit us. After we left we came to some telegraph wires which had been shot away and had fallen across the street. We had to cut the wires away with our bayonets.

On Wednesday morning we went to a village near Le Cateau, and there we had to loophole all the houses, so that the infantry could fire from them. After fortifying the town we left it and went on to another place, where there was a church. We saw the Red Cross flying there, and knew it had been turned into a hospital. Our wounded were being taken in there in dozens, but the Germans shelled it and the place was knocked to pieces. Some of the wounded were got out, but not all. We left there and then had to go and do some trenching. We were hampered by our picks and shovels. We could see some cavalry in the distance under cover, but shells were flying all around them. They got away, but the horses must have had to run like deer.

The soldiers take everything quite coolly. You would have thought they were at a football cup-tie. They were lying in the trenches with German shells flying all around, and they would make bets as to how many Germans they would kill and had killed during the day. They were laughing and joking all the time. A party of the King's Own went into one battle shouting out, 'Early doors this way! Early doors, ninepence!' There were chaps, too, coming in and having their wounds dressed, and going off again to have another go at the Germans. Our men fought simply grand. At Landrecies, while our men were lying in the trenches there were a couple of fellows playing marbles with bullets from shrapnel shells which had burst around them.

The officers are grand. They do everything they can for our comfort. They are always looking after our chaps, and I cannot speak highly enough of them. The men, too, seem pleased to think that they are doing their duty to the officers.

APPENDIX B

THE two following accounts (which we are allowed by the courtesy of *The Times* and the *Observer* to reproduce) relate to the fighting of Monday, August 24, and subsequent days. They are given by men who were on the extreme left of the British position, south of Mons; probably both were attached to the 19th Infantry Brigade, which was sent up from Valenciennes on the 24th to support the Second Corps. The first narrator is a sergeant in a Welsh regiment; the second a gunner.

I

On Monday morning, we found ourselves in a valley just three miles south of Mons. We could not see the town, but on a slope and a thousand yards in front of us was a long line of British batteries shelling the enemy in the town. The Germans replied, and, evidently guessing that the artillery had infantry support, sent many shells bursting over the hill in our direction.

We entrenched ourselves, some 13,000 of us. The German cavalry came swooping down. There were at least three brigades, about 9,000 men. We put up a good fight, but we had to retire, and did so in an orderly style, covered by a strong fire from our artillery.

As we did so, the whole German attack developed. At least one Army Corps and a half were moving along our left flank as fast as they could—some 60,000 men or more. We were now with the rest of our brigade, but it was impossible to meet such a strength of the enemy. All we

could do was to fall back, as there was no help for us from our right flank.

Our orders to retire came from head-quarters, and formed part of a well-considered plan to draw on this rash advance of the German right wing in extended line. Covered by our guns, we eventually reached —.

I cannot praise too highly the conduct of the rank and file. They had fought a long series of desultory combats and had been under heavy shell fire, and, what to them was far worse, a constant series of thunder-showers. And yet they marched over thirty miles with a cheery confidence, singing nearly all the way. Much of it was a night march, and yet I only heard of one man who fell out and did not report himself by next morning. We reached — at midnight and were billeted there.

There was little rest for us, however, as most of us moved out at an early hour on Tuesday morning to a line of low hills on the east, which seemed to offer a fine position. Our numbers had been strengthened during the night.

We were entrenched on the hills with our field artillery and also our batteries, which were excellently placed. This time the Germans got the range well. They did not take their usual blundering sighting shots, but plumped right on to our lines. They were admirably helped by aeroplanes, which flew low enough to sight our positions, but still out of range. We tried to wing them, but failed. Later, however, we got one down, and I was told, though I did not see it myself, that the whole aerial fleet was put out of action by our guns.

At 11 o'clock in the morning the German enveloping movement of which they are so fond began again, but our artillery appeared and they promptly retreated.

II

We fought our way to Mons. Five infantry regiments were already there, and had advanced to attack the Germans, who were entrenched. The latter were too strong for them, and our men were severely mauled. We took up a position on the left flank, and we opened fire at a range of 1,000 yards. Our aim was very good, but it took the Germans a long time to get the range. They are good artillery men but bad shots. Then the German artillery opened fire heavily. The infantry had to wait while we made a clearance for them, and they did not get along for two hours.

There were eight or nine Germans to every Englishman. As fast as we killed them they came on, but we succeeded in pulling down the odds. We retired to Donicourt, and when three parts of the way up the hill the traces of my gun broke and fetched the gun down on top of me. I could not move until a Frenchman took me along and put me in the hospital at St. Quentin.

The gunner mentioned that the British captured a German gun at Donicourt. One of his comrades, he said, had his legs blown off, and the limber waggons were full of British wounded. 'The Germans are frightened of the bayonet,' he added, with a laugh. 'They're a foul lot. When they catch any of our wounded they cut their wrists with their bayonets to prevent them using rifles, or jam them on the ground with the butts of their rifles.'

The gunner declared that the German losses were three times as heavy as the British, and was confident that the Allies would be successful. 'I want to get back to the front as soon as the doctor says I'm fit to man a gun. I don't want to stop here.'

APPENDIX C

AN interesting glimpse of the fighting round Cateau is given in the following narrative. The narrator, a soldier in the Connaught Rangers, was apparently stationed west of Cateau on Tuesday, the 25th; his Division, the 4th, under General Snow, was engaged in repelling the German flank attack from the direction of Cambrai. We are indebted to the courtesy of the *Evening News* for leave to reproduce this account.

‘A GRAND TIME.’

It was a grand time we had, and I wouldn't have missed it for lashins of money. It was near to Cambrai when we had our best time.

The Germans kept pressing our rear-guard all the time, and at last our colonel could stand it no longer, so the word was passed round that we were to give them hell and all. There were at least five to one, and we were in danger of being cut off.

With that up got the colonel. ‘Rangers of Connaught,’ says he, ‘the eyes of all Ireland are on you to-day, and I know you never could disgrace the old country by allowing Germans to beat you while you have arms in your hands and hearts in your breasts.’

‘Up then and at them, and if you don't give them the soundest thrashing they ever got, you needn't look me in the face again in this world or the next.’

And we went for them with just what you would know of a prayer to the Mother of our Lord to be merciful to the loved ones at home if we should fall in the fight. We charged through and through them until they broke and ran like frightened hares in terror of hounds.

After that taste of the fighting quality of the Rangers they never troubled us any more that day.

APPENDIX D

THE following account (which we print by the courtesy of *The Times*), gives a good picture of the method in which the British Force held its own during the temporary halts on the retirement. The place of this particular action is not indicated; but it is vividly described. The narrator is a non-commissioned officer.

A CHARGE OF THE HUSSARS.

As the Germans came into view in the open in front of our hastily dug trenches our men opened on them with a steady fire that never once went wide, and we could see clean-cut gaps in the tightly packed ranks as the hail of lead tore its jagged way through them. They were a game lot, however, and kept closing up the gaps in their ranks as though they were so many marionettes. Flesh and blood cannot stand this sort of thing for ever, and after a while they began to come along with less confident step. Then they halted for a few minutes, gazed about them in a dazed sort of way, and ran like hares. Their place was taken by another bluish-grey mass behind them, and this body came on in much the same way until they too had had as much as they could stand, and then there was another bolt for the rear.

This advancing and retreating went on for hours, each retirement unmasking a fresh body of men, and by the time they were close enough to hurl themselves on our trenches it was an entirely fresh mass of men, who had suffered little from our fire. As they scrambled up they seemed cocksure of themselves, but they had forgotten our men posted under cover on their right, and just as they were steadying themselves for one last rush at us a withering fire was opened on them, and at the same time we cleared the way for the

Hussars, who were at them right and left as soon as the fire of our men ceased.

Hell's fury blazed from the eyes of the trapped Germans as they tried to grapple with their new foe, and we stood there silent spectators, lest we should hit our cavalry. It only took them a few minutes to make up their minds, and, with a blood-curdling wail that I shall remember to my dying day, they ran as though all the fiends were after them. They were cut down like chaff, and it was at this point that most of the prisoners were taken by our men. Rifles, bandoliers, caps, and everything else that could be cast off was sacrificed to speed, and many of the scared men outpaced easily the tired horses of our Hussars.

Later, during a lull in the fight, we went out to collect their wounded lying near our trenches, and you would hardly believe the fury that was manifested against us. I think they hate us ten times worse than they hate the French, and that is saying a lot. Those of them who talk English tell us that had it not been for our interference they would have been in Paris now dictating terms of peace, and that is why they hate us so.

APPENDIX E

THE following (which we print by the courtesy of *The Times*) is the diary of a civilian who witnessed the fighting in Tournai on Monday, August 24, between the flank-guard of the German right wing, which was marching in the direction of St. Amand to attack the English left at Valenciennes. The French troops who attempted to hold Tournai were part of a Territorial corps which had hurried up by forced marches. They were opposed by picked troops in superior numbers, and were ultimately captured on the retreat from Tournai.

TIME TABLE OF THE BATTLE.

7 a.m., Monday, August 24.—A French advance guard entered Tournai, and at once took position in the northern suburb. They had a 'section' of 'Dragoons' and four companies of the 84th Territorial Regiment, 1,000 in all, led by Brigade-General Marquis de Villaret. These men had left Orchies at 3 a.m., a march of eleven miles, and needed rest, which many of them only found in the grave. Hardly had they halted when a German column was signalled north-west, on the Renaix road, one mile only from the French outposts. The conflict was imminent, and General de Villaret posted infantry 'sections' at all street corners and railway viaducts.

At 8 a.m. the guns began to thunder so near and so loud that we thought all the time they were part of the French artillery. A sergeant near my door told me his major was already killed, and we saw his horse led back across the station square, pierced everywhere in body and limbs, spilling floods of blood.

8.30 a.m.—The French are holding the whole town south of the Brussels-Calais line, behind the big station buildings, sidings, and fences. They had retreated already from the suburb, leaving the northern side of the railway to the Germans, but tried to keep two bridges that lead into Tournai from both sides of the station. A man came running and warning the sergeant that the Germans were crawling along the fences just over the railway, and going westwards unseen to turn the French left.

9 a.m.—The rifle reports become so frequent that I rush home and take my wife, children, and servants to the cellar. No more civilians are to be seen in the streets or avenues; the French themselves have disappeared. The artillery

fire has ceased, but we hear the shooting of rifles so much nearer. My poor folks are helplessly frightened.

9.30.—I remember that a window has been left open in our bedroom, and that usually brings trouble, the invaders always pretending to have been shot from private houses. I run upstairs to shut it, and what I saw at that very moment I shall never forget. The square was quite deserted, the sun shining brightly on carefully closed houses and windows. The shooting was incessant, bullets fell everywhere, on the cobblestones, on the pavements, on the garden balustrades, raising almost undiscernible little flakes of dust. Suddenly I stood amazed, unable to move, fascinated by this novel sight; from the far end of a boulevard there came crawling along the trees grey shadows, some holding bicycles, some shooting as they walked on.

Before I had time to realize who they were the station square garden was full of them, taking cover under the bushes, behind the statues, shooting towards all the streets that converge to that place. One darted to jump over the railing; I distinctly saw a bullet prick the ground close to his foot. He jumped aside and fell behind a big lamp-post. Was he wounded? I did not stop to watch; for the first time I felt my curiosity too unsafe indeed. I ran down to join my family, all crying and praying, a most desolate scene, amongst our little babies horrified by our distraction, although unconscious of the real horrors that were taking place in front of our house.

10 a.m.—We could see a part of the action through the kitchen window, always dreading that bullets might find us, as we heard ricochets on all the outside walls. Then we suddenly listened to a new and strange sound, the most nerve-racking of that distressing morning, and saw the Maxim guns driven to all street corners successively. Their quick, continuous reports recall a very loud motor-cycle

engine. We had to endure that horrid noise for more than one hour, ever thinking of the deadly havoc they ought to make at the other end of the boulevard. Louder still there rang the hoarse commands of officers and non-coms., the running and marching of new platoons, the stamping of their heavy boots. How we feared they should break our door open, loot the house, and maltreat us; and yet we had not heard of Louvain, and that they could reach such wanton barbarity.

What struck me was the wonderful discipline of these men during the two hours of fighting I witnessed, most of all the great prestige of the non-com. officers, their firm and imperious handling of their detachments, truly an invaluable asset for such an offensive force. So much greater was their responsibility for relaxing that ascendancy and letting loose their furious slaves to drink and loot.

The grey-clad Germans now and then ventured out of cover, running cleverly from corner to corner, and, to say the truth, appeared quite courageous and fearless under the firing of the French, now making a last stand before the bridges of the Scheldt. And these old Vendée Territorials of forty, pressed by young and picked men of a choice Regular corps, also did wonders indeed, for they bravely held their ground a whole morning against artillery and Maxims, of which they had none, and only gave way when surrounded by German reinforcements pouring from all sides

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